



Season 4 | Episode # 14

God's Power in Weakness - A Message from Joni Eareckson Tada

Joni Eareckson Tada

Crystal Keating:

I'm Crystal Keating and you're listening to the Joni and Friends Ministry Podcast. Each week we're bringing you encouraging conversations about finding hope through hardship... and sharing practical ways that you can include people with disability in your church and community.

Today, I'm thrilled to share a special message from my friend, Joni Eareckson Tada, founder and CEO of Joni and Friends. When a dive into shallow water and a broken neck left Joni with quadriplegia fifty-five years ago, she felt like her life was over. She fell into a deep depression, wondering what good could come out of a life with legs that couldn't walk or hands that didn't work.

Joni couldn't imagine that God would use her affliction for good let alone to birth an international disability ministry, reaching thousands of people around the world with the gospel. Now, marking the milestone of fifty-five years in a wheelchair, not to mention surviving two bouts with cancer, severe breathing issues, and chronic pain, Joni can see the purposes God has accomplished through her suffering, both in her own life and for others. She celebrates her five and a half decades with quadriplegia because, in her pain and weakness, God has transformed her heart, changed her attitude, and shown her there are more important things in life than walking.

I hope you are inspired by Joni's message and see your own purpose. I pray that no matter what you are facing today, your weakness will be the beautiful platform on which God displays his power through you.

Joni Eareckson Tada:

You know, fifty-five years ago when I broke my neck and became a, a quadriplegic, I felt as though my life were over. I was paralyzed a, a quadriplegic living without use of my hands or my legs. I mean, come on. What, what good purpose could there be in going on, sitting down for the rest of my life with very little functioning ability? None of it made sense. And so, I sank into a deep depression. Months later, when I was finally transferred from the hospital to rehab and I was able to go to occupational therapy, it was my OT who challenged me to draw holding, you know, pencils between my teeth.

She had heard, I had a little bit of an artistic talent. So, she said to me, Joni, just draw what's on your heart. And so, this is what I sketched. In this drawing, I wanted to convey. Oh, God, this is now my life. I gotta do this. I don't have the strength. I cannot do disability. Again, I just saw no



purpose. But around that same time, friends started sharing words of encouragement from the Bible, good words, helpful words.

I learned from the Bible how to, how to say thanks in all things, how to trust God in the midst of adversity. I learned that if God sent his own son Jesus to die for me, then, then surely, he proved his intentions. He, he proved that he was trustworthy. These were all very helpful words that gave me such comfort, strength, and best of all, hope. Christian friends also pointed me to places in the Bible that talked about purpose.

And one verse particularly struck me. It's where the apostle Paul, he's uh, he's writing from prison. He's limited. He's confined to chains. And yet in Philippians 1:12, he says, I want you to know that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. Man, did that intrigue me.

At the time I still felt as though my wheelchair were a, a prison. I felt chained. I felt confined by my disability. Could I accept that what had happened to me was going to serve to advance the gospel? If so, and, and maybe so that just might be my purpose in life. God seemed to be saying to me, Joni, what has happened to you, your paralyzing accident will one day serve to advance the gospel.

Oh, my goodness. Here I was way too weak, way too weak to envision any kind of purpose for my disability. Yet God was showing me a deeper meaning to my hardships. And oh, did that spark hope in my heart! Talk about inspiring purpose. I mean, what I read Philippians 1:12, it was, it was like, God himself gave me a clear vision for my life.

Perhaps months earlier, I did not have the strength and hope. But I was now compelled to go deeper into God's word. And as I delved deeper, I saw that, although I did not have the strength to quote, "do quadriplegia," I could do all things through the strength of Christ. Yes, even live without use of my hands or my legs.

And I wasn't alone. God was with me. It's what his name means, Emmanuel God with us. God, with us in our struggles and heartaches. And yes, God with me in my disability. Thank you, Jesus. When you know that God is with you, you can go through anything. Yes, even lifelong quadriplegia. And so, what happened to me really has served to advance the gospel.

It is my message to anyone with any limitation, perhaps even you here today. We can do all things, but only through Christ who strengthens us. And that was a message that inspired purpose in my life because I wanted other people with disabilities, people like me to find their strength in God. And so, after I was released from rehab, and I had languished there almost two years in different institutions. When I was released, I began to ask God, tell me, you know, like kind of flesh out that purpose for my life. And the first thing I did was write a mission statement for my life. And this is what I wrote down. And this has gotta be what, forty-five years ago, Okay?



I wrote I wanna be God's best audio-visual aid of how his power is displayed in weakness. You know, it has been decades since I wrote that. But even now, so many years later, I would not change a word. I still wanna be God's best audio-visual aid so that others can experience his power in their weakness.

Oh, man, what a purpose. And eventually, it is why I started Joni and Friends way back in 1979. And our ministry is all about advancing the gospel and displaying God's power through weakness. We wanna help the world's disabled grasp the fact that they too can do all things through Christ. We want them to see that their weakness can be a platform from which God can best display his power and his glory.

And so, our mission statement for Joni and Friends is to glorify God as we communicate the gospel. At Joni and friends, we envision a world where every person with a disability finds hope, dignity, and their place in the body of Christ. And we do it by training churches, holding retreats, getaways for special needs families.

We take wheelchairs overseas to needy disabled kids and adults. We established Joni's House locations around the world to serve disabled people in developing nations. Truly, when I look back to that dreadful day, I broke my neck, I can say that what has happened to me is serving to advance the gospel of God's love.

So, God bless you for hearing my heart today. And I trust that what I have shared helps you in your weakness. That yes, you really can do every hard thing through Christ who strengthens you. Let your weakness and need be the beautiful platform on which God displays his power through you.

Crystal Keating:

Thank you for listening to the Joni and Friends Ministry Podcast. If you've been inspired, would you leave a 5-star review? And don't forget to subscribe! You can also visit joniandfriends.org/podcast to send me a message. I'm Crystal Keating and thank you for joining me for the Joni and Friends Ministry Podcast.

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